

**Abstract ID :** 495

**Title :** Observations of North Atlantic Right Whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*) Entanglements and Related Mortalities in the Southeast U.S. Calving Grounds

**Category :** Conservation

**Student :**

**Preferred Format :** Poster Presentation

**Abstract :** Entanglement in fishing gear is a serious threat to the recovery of North Atlantic right whales. The number of entanglements for this species is reportedly one of the highest known for large whale populations studied along the eastern United States and Canadian waters. Over the past several years, federally funded research efforts including ship-strike mitigation flights, individual identification, and genetics sampling have significantly increased the surveillance of right whales in the southeast U.S. (SEUS) during the winter calving season. Concurrently, an increase in the number of reports of entangled North Atlantic right whales in the SEUS has been documented. The increase in entanglement reports in the SEUS has prompted support for establishing regional teams that are skilled in disentanglement procedures and for strategically placing equipment caches in Florida and Georgia. Since 1991, a total of six entangled whales have been reported in the southeast, four of the six since 2002. In addition to the six entanglements, two whales have been sighted with scars from serious previous entanglements. To date, the two whales displaying evidence of their previous entanglements have been sighted only in the SEUS. One, a calf sighted in 1994 is presumed dead, and the other, an adult sighted in 2003, was reported in poor condition. Of the six reported entangled whales, three remain entangled, two have been sighted free of gear and one is a known mortality. The origin of the gear remains unknown, due to the difficulty of retrieval there is little physical evidence available to aid in identifying the type and origin of the entangling gear. Although disentanglement efforts should not be viewed as the solution to this serious problem, it is a necessary approach until management strategies successfully mitigate entanglement of whales in fishing gear.